

## ART EXHIBITIONS.

## THE HARRIS, HOLBROOK AND BLAKES-LEE COLLECTIONS.

Dr. E. M. Harris, of Providence, and Mr. Edward Holbrook, of New-York, have been private collectors of works of art. Mr. T. J. Blakeslee has long been well known as a dealer in pictures in this city. The consolidation of their three collections in the galleries of the American Art Association tends to these rooms a varied and interesting effect. Old paintings of the English and Continental schools are accompanied by works from the modern French artists and men of our own day. The three owners have wisely refrained from grouping their possessions separately. The exhibition has been arranged as though it were one collection. There is a certain novelty about it. Examples of the earlier painters are seldom seen in such numbers as upon this occasion. That the intrinsic value of the old masters included is on a par with their numerical strength could hardly be maintained. Paintings by Sir Joshua and Van Dyke, for example, of absolutely major significance, are none too often in the market anywhere, and the first-rate things from their hands that reach our shores are necessarily few. But a painting of the last century, or of its predecessor, often reaches a respectable standard, while missing the highest, and many of the old portraits in the present exhibition are meritorious enough to be received with lively interest, if not with the enthusiasm, reserved for masterpieces.

It may not inaptly be remarked, indeed, apropos of this exhibition, that nowhere is a temperate and cautious method of criticism more essential than among the old masters. They are not sacrosanct, an old master is not, as a matter of course, a miracle of art. Neither, on the other hand, is an old painting to be condemned because it does not compare favorably with the gems of the Louvre or the Prado. There is a great mass of work distributed among the public and private galleries of Europe, and conspicuous from time to time in the auction-room, which has been embalmed by the accident of time and has besides some valuable qualities. It is not great, but it illustrates more or less the traditions of great men, great epochs, and the world does not willingly let it die. Claudio Coello, for instance (who, by the way, is not to be confused with Alonso Sanchez Coello), is not, at his best, a painter of renown. But he is extremely interesting as an exemplar of the kind of art that you before and after the apogee of Velasquez led an anomalous existence in Spain, denying in its every quality the noble breadth and abounding vitality of that supreme painter, but commanding an indubitable vogue through its courtly polish and dignity. There are two portraits by him in the exhibition. In neither of them is there so much as a breadth of inspiration or of individuality. Whatever emotions the painter may have felt when he was painting were concealed by the rigidity of his scheme. It seems not unnatural that a dingle-ness tone should characterize the face in "A Patriotic Lady"; the costume was plainly the first object of the artist's solicitude. While there is more animation in the painting of the features in "Don Fernando of Austria," the first thing here again is the dress. But in both cases the dress is charming! It is all very hard, formal, even rather trivial when you consider that the wearers of these sumptuous garments were, after all, human beings, with passions like unto those of the rest of mankind; but we cannot blame Coello for not being something which he was never meant to be: we can only smile with quiet pleasure over his archaic gaudiness. Character sometimes is disclosed in these old products of a heretical society and an imbecile art. There is something beyond a quaint conception of design in the "Portrait of a Gentleman" by Miereveld, a work wherein the brush follows with the utmost precision, and with a little subtlety, the obscurer elements in the physiognomy of the subject. But the quality that counts most in this and in the other two portraits by Miereveld, in the examples of Van Ravesteyn, Mytens and Pourbus, is the quality of a skilfully decorated surface; the souls of these painters could not rise to lofty issues, but their fingers were deft, they painted their sitters as rather splendid lay figures, they left us portraits which, if sadly hollow, at any rate make a brave show on wall which is hung near by perhaps with ancient tapestries. If a greater dignity may be attributed to any of the portraits in this category it would be to the tall "Princess Palatine" of Pieter Codde. There is a stately simplicity about this fine canvas which gives it a firmer hold on the memory than many of the old pictures in the show can boast. There is some interesting technique in it, and it has a trace of individuality, a hint of distinction. Among the more important of the old paintings we regret to say that there are too many hints and not as many complete revelations of genius as we would wish. No one could be much concerned over the deficiency of the "Portrait of Dutch Lady and Child," by Cornelius de Vos, in the clear, keen quality which characterizes the best works by that master. De Vos is not a greatly moving painter under any circumstances. But there are other cases which are approached in a more exacting spirit.

As we have suggested above, one must not expect too much of an old master. Yet the chiefs in that immortal company are bound to be tested by their happiest achievements. One can never see unsatisfactory works attributed to them without feeling a sensation of regret that cannot be extinguished by even the most voluminous proofs of authenticity. Both the portraits given to Van Dyke in this exhibition bear the honor plausibly, yet neither in the "Earl of Arundel" nor in the "Lord Dudley" do the virtues present alone for the lack of that final excellence which makes a thoroughly characteristic work by the great Fleming one of the treasures of art. Van Dyke has his bad passages, of course, and some very brilliant works by him exist which are unevenly painted, but the master hand is always obviously in control—the good points outweigh the bad. In the "Lord Dudley" there is nothing except the fluent modelling to speak of the true Van Dyke, and the "Earl of Arundel," while admirable in the work about the face and about the right hand, is, as a whole, without the resonance of color, the beauty of style, which every class student of the painter inevitably demands. Van Dyke was one of the few artists of the low countries to whom beauty meant a great deal that was refined and noble. He had an incomparable elegance, which gave to his portraits of men almost as much charm as will be found in his portraits of women. Then his color was often superb. The trouble with the "Earl of Arundel" is that in execution it lacks elasticity, and in tone it lacks the pure beauty which invariably belongs to a Van Dyke of commanding character. It is a fine portrait—finer than anything in that group to which we have referred with mild approval above—but we repeat, a hint of distinction is enough in Mytens or Claudio Coello. When Van Dyke, a prince among painters, is in question, we are dissatisfied with anything save the artist's richest and best. Of Sir Joshua we may speak in much the same way. The two small portraits, "Lady Mary Nugent Temple" and "Lady Charlotte Johnstone," are pleasing examples, but in a very minor vein, and the huge "Frederick, Duke of York" is not saved by its origin from being a cold and even ugly canvas, aggressive in the morbidity of its colors. Romney also is badly represented. On the other hand, one of the three Lawrences, "Queen Caroline, when Princess of Wales," is decidedly captivating, with all of the painter's facile grace and sexual feeling, and we have nothing but sympathy for the portraits which illustrate several old Englishmen known but slightly in America. Sir William Beechey, Sir Nathaniel Dance, Sir Martin Stuett, Henry Fuseli, George H. Harlow, Johann Zoffany and John Opie are all artists whom no amount of discussion will ever place in the front rank of English art and keep there. But they are historically interesting. Opie and Beechey had moments in which they almost stumbled upon lasting fame, and, though such moments are not symboled in the particular canvases to which we are now directing attention, it is worth while having the old names brought once more before the public. It is instructive to see the kind of work that was at one time popular in England, and that still moderately holds its own. "Lady Cooper and Her Children" by Dancy, is not an exciting production, but it is a solid, serious, not inartistic work, like those Continental portraits to which we have referred. It is linked to a famous tradition, and we would rather see this in our Metropolitan Museum, than, say, the dreamy "Frederick, Duke of York," of Sir Joshua. A public collection wants a nearly perfect within his clearly defined limits, and the "Lady Cooper and Her Children" would be a welcome acquisition at the Museum. The Gainsborough portrait of Dr. Johnson is of dubious value—a terrible anticlimax when the great portrait by Reynolds is remembered—and a canvas quite without Gainsborough's magic. "A Surrey Landscape" and "The Market Cart," especially the latter, has caused her engagements for the remainder of this week at the Hollis Street Theatre to be withdrawn. The body was buried in Oakwood Cemetery.

for landscapes. Gainsborough's two studies from nature standing apart.

The modern canvases make a fine show. The Barbizon men are all visible in first-rate examples, Daubigny, on the very threshold of the exhibition, takes the observer captive. "On the French Coast" may be somewhat disappointing in its sketchy, roughly handled sky, but there is life in the spacious canvas, and the composition is exceptionally beautiful. The great Corots are two or three little panels, of which we would especially mention "Le Buisson sous Bois," a work in which a scene of reposeful sylvan loveliness is painted with irresistible poetry and delicacy. Rousseau comes off with small glory in "Les Gorges d'Apennine," the other soliloquies were Francis Rogers, the baritone, and Frank Wilcock, the violinist. Among the patroresses of the entertainment, most of whom were Mrs. Edmund L. Baylies, Mrs. Henry D. Valentine, Mrs. Robert Winthrop, Mrs. Edward Adams, Mrs. R. Fulton Cutting, Mrs. Horace Gallatin, Mrs. George Gibbs, Mrs. Fredrick Douglass, James M. Pease, Mrs. Lloyd S. Bryce, Mrs. George Baker, Mrs. Henry F. Dimock, Mrs. John H. Watson, Mrs. E. Tiffany Dyer, Mrs. Peter Cooper Hewitt, Miss Furman, Mrs. William C. Brewster, Mrs. John D. Wing, Mrs. Jules Montant, Miss De Forest, Miss Callieger, Mrs. Robert Mintrum, Mrs. T. J. Oakeley, Rhinelander, Mrs. Alfred C. Lovell, Mrs. Edward Mitchell, Mrs. E. Hastings Ripley, Mrs. William A. Street, Mrs. Alfred H. Thorpe and Mrs. Frederick W. Vanderbilt.

Another incident of the afternoon was the Easter Bazaar, held at the Waldorf-Astoria, in aid of the Normal College Alumnae Settlement, which was opened by President Seth Low, and will be continued to-morrow. There were many attractive features at the bazaar, one of which was the book booth, where Misses Princeton, Mrs. Bronson Meany, Miss Helen Gray Long, Mrs. Annie Nathan Meyer, Miss Mattox Proctor, Mrs. Abby Sage Richardson and Mrs. Harriett Ott Dallenbach. The photograph booth was in charge of Miss Emma Frohman.

The last meeting this season of the Friday Evening Dancing Class, whose fortunes are most carefully looked after by Mrs. Benjamin S. Church, was held at Sherry's last night. There was a splendid attendance of members and guests, who were received by Mrs. Church, Mrs. Henry R. Beckman, Mrs. Mayfield, Miss Morris, Mrs. Arthur J. Peabody, Mrs. Edward Curtis, who came in from Morrisania, and Mrs. George Schiffeloff. The conductor was led by Harry Hatchell. The favors were far from the ribbons. Unless something unforeseen occurs the class will resume its meetings next fall at Sherry's.

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